dial drunk, die a drunk, die for you

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by miladiel

Summary

Listen to me–I am your echo. I would rather break the world than lose you.
–Amal El-Mohtar & Max Gladstone, *This is How You Lose the Time War*

During the time he spent at Stalag Luft III, Major John "Bucky" Egan wrote 12 levers.

Notes

If you had told me I'd be writing what is essentially Stucky 2.0 fic in 2024, I wouldn't have been too surprised but I would have asked you what on earth happened to me. Well, here we are. Can't resist a soldier named Bucky pining after his best friend. Anyway, this is obviously, obviously inspired by Not Easily Conquered by dropdeaddream & WhatAreFears. They truly are visionaries and geniuses and if you haven't read NEC, you're missing out. Seriously. If you ever wonder where I got my writing style from, that's where.

Now, onto this silly little project I started on a whim. Bucky my delulu king!!! He's so in love. He's so insecure. He changes his mind a thousand times in less than a minute.

I didn't edit this enough cause honestly I'm a little sick of seeing it. Forgive me. Also, I'm German. The two bits of German you get in here are certified by yours truly, don't worry.

I hope you enjoy. <3

See the end of the work for more notes

These letters were never found. To the world, they do not exist.

Buck,

I don't have to explain flying to you. The thrill of it. The freedom. Getting swallowed by clouds only to break free a moment later and see endless stretches of water. Entire countries underneath you. Sweetest air you'll ever breathe, even when it kills you.

God fucked up a lot of things but not this.

You remember the first time we were up there? Don't tell anyone but I was scared shitless when they made us climb higher and higher, up into altitudes I wouldn't wish upon anyone. I threw up after. Right behind the plane, while you and the rest were already getting back to camp. I almost told you, before I saw that spark in your eyes you only have when you get near a plane, and knew you'd never understand what it's like, to be scared of the skies. Marge should be jealous. You never looked at her like that.

I got over it, of course. Before I could understand why, I was craving being up there. Even when they sent us straight to hell and back. This I don't have to explain to you, either. It's your fault, after all, that I got too fond of the taste.

Most people, when they look at us, they think it's the other way around, that I'm the bad influence. And on the ground, God help me, I won't deny it. I drink and gamble and smoke and you don't. But in the air, you're the devil. I've never seen anyone fly like you do and come out of it alive, Buck. It scares me right down to my bones. You always talk of death and how lucky you are to slip past it and I know now that it's 'cause you got too close too many times. Closer than anyone. You like its touch, don't you? Makes you a hero.

Makes people wanna look up to you. Without trying you're their torch. My torch. Worse, my North Star. I don't think there's been a single day since you've come crashing into my life where I haven't looked for you. Whether you're right next to me or thousands of miles away. The only times I ever knew, without a doubt, that I'd make it back down safe and sound, was when I had you up in the air with me.

But you're humble, of course. If I told you any of this, you'd shake your head and laugh at me. Tell me to sober up, get a few hours of sleep. That's why I'm writing it all down and hiding it from you as much as I'm hiding it from the Krauts.

This is a letter you won't receive and it won't even be the post's fault.

They got us good this time, huh? Trapped like zoo animals. It's only been a couple months and I feel myself going insane – it's hard to forget the world so wide below you, especially when you're forced to do nothing but drag yourself through another day by the skin of your teeth in some rotten patch of Germany. Was eine Scheiße, as the Nazi-bastards say.

You think any of the men we flew with are still around? You think they miss us? Or did they forget us, like we forgot about all the missing soldiers so we could bear the next mission? I don't like being on the other side of that. They better built us memorials. Statues. Kiss the places we slept and pissed every time they pass and touch the crosses around their necks, to ask God to make them fly just half as good as us. It's the least they can do.

I don't pray a lot these days. I don't think God has much left to offer me. I've seen hell and it's not underground and I've seen heaven and it looks just the same. Besides, I got you, don't I? That's just as good. Recite your Hail Mary's and Our Father's and find your peace but leave me out of it. I have found religion and I regret to inform you, it's not in churches or books or a cross of oil painted on your forehead to keep misfortune away.

It's in the curves of your collarbones. The crooks of your pointy fucking elbows. The lines of your mouth. In every word you utter. You, Gale Cleven, are holy. Everyone can see it.

You ask me if I'm fine and I tell you I've never been better, which we both know is a lie, but not entirely, and that's the part you don't know. It was worse being safe at the base without you. It was worse having to survive unsure whether you were waiting for me out there. I'm cold and hungry and want to get out but you're next to me, after everything. That's what matters.

I meant what I said, Buck. It's you and me.

Yours

Buck,

Now that there's no planes to oggle, it's Marge's letters that make you smile the most. You've been reading and rereading it since you got the newest one, on cloud nine, and I haven't been brave enough yet to ask why. You're doing it right now, actually, right behind me as I write this. Smelling the paper. Tracing her handwriting. Both of us should be asleep. You're not even asking me what I'm doing, you rude fuck. I gotta tell you, Buck, it's not the nicest perfume. There's much better. But I doubt that matters to you, lovesick fool that you are.

The boys, they're surprised when they find out you got a sweetheart. They always come to me to ask me the same five questions and I have to roll my eyes and laugh, tell them, "'course he's got a girl! There ain't a man more loyal than Buck."

It's like when they get to know us, the very same confusion at the mirror names and the opposites that carry them. They wonder, just like me, why you're sticking with me when there's much better men out there. For a few days, they'll call me Buck and you Bucky, and we'll pretend to be offended, making them laugh as we bicker like old spouses, and I'll look at them and feel a sharp pride in my chest that they're not close enough to join in. All because you're loyal, Buck. To the core. You know me like you know yourself and I'd rather let the entire US Army burn down before letting that change.

We're made of the same rib, you and I. Same stubborn marrow. You just got the prettier half.

This is all to say, I know what's in the letter. You don't have to tell me. We should be asleep but we both know why we're not. We're at war and I stopped dreaming about anything but blood and bombs. Before this, and I know you don't believe me, I was full of ambition. I made up countless scenarios of who I might become. I barely remember any of them now. Maybe I wanted to go to university. Maybe I wanted to become a mechanic. It doesn't really matter – these days, war is all I got inside me. And you, with your storm-blue eyes and your smiling mouth and the scars we're collecting like postmarks, you're part of that.

I'll be your best man, Buck. Just don't ask me to be happy about it.

You're getting sick. I don't know if you've noticed already but I'll give you a day before I convince the Krauts to leave you with me cause I don't trust a single one of them, white lab coat or not, and I get to play nurse.

I'll take care of you just fine, don't worry about it. It's the least I can do.

Don't throw up on me, though. I'll never be able to forgive you, and wouldn't that be a shame.

Yours

Buck,

Well, Major, you did it. Got puke all over my sweater. Thanks for that, you bastard, now I'll have to borrow one of yours. I won't mind but I can already tell you'll be pissed like I'm not the only person in the world right now giving a rat's ass whether you make it through or not. You're very protective over your things, you know that?

Anyway, you're coming down with the flu just like I said you would. It's fucking awful. We have to watch out that you don't get all the other boys sick and I have to watch you shivering under five blankets and ten layers of clothes. Don't ever get sick again, Buck. I can't do this. It's almost worse than Bremen, I swear to God. At least there I didn't have to actively see you suffer. Now every cough from you is enough to give me a heart attack.

I should've taken you to London with me. There was this fella on the street, and he was screaming about Jesus. Resurrection, he said, was the hardest part of believing. But, Buck, I'm not so sure about that. You and I, we've been resurrected many times. Not reborn – that'd mean we left something behind. Just made to live, time and time again. That's war, I think, or maybe I'm just drunk.

You finally fell asleep. I think your fever's going down, which means I get a minute to myself. You're clingy when you're unwell. Couldn't get up to have a smoke without you complaining. Asking me to stay. Not sure if I should be insulted that you'd even think I wouldn't. I'd take a hundred bullets for you, no questions asked.

The boys are starting to take the piss out of me. Hamilton's been having the time of his life calling me your wife. Yeah, I'd be a good wife, as long as I'm yours. I ain't ashamed of that. I'd marry you right now if I could. Really, truly. I'd drag you to the altar, sick as you are, and wouldn't regret a thing. You'd say yes. Would you say yes? I know you and you know me and everybody knows we're inevitable, dusk and dawn, Buck-and-Bucky, forever.

So tell me, what is it that you like more about her than me? The dresses? The long hair? The lipstick? Cause I'll do it all, Buck, for you I'll do it all. I'll wear the prettiest dresses and put on lipstick till you won't even notice I'm no girl.

I know that's not enough. You like girls and Marge best of all, and I like you. There's no helping that. But I dream, sometimes. You keep me dreaming, Buck. Of a future where poor bastards like me can marry their best friends. Of you wanting to kiss me back.

You wanna know something, baby? The reason we met is war, and I want it to end, trust me, I do, but it scares me. I'm not so sure I can stop being a soldier. You got dropped at my feet with both of us in uniform and I don't want to give that up, yet. There's not much left of me without you.

It's getting even colder. I didn't think it possible. We'll freeze to death before I ever get to hear you nag the shit outta my ass again. See, I've found the only good thing about this illness of yours: you can't talk. For someone who barely gets his mouth open in front of others, you're awfully chatty when it comes to me. "Oh, Bucky, do this, and Bucky do that, and no, Bucky, you can't, and why are you drinking again, John?" That's what we really gotta cure here. I don't care how much these other fuckers adore you. I know you, don't you forget that. You're annoying and a puritan and one day, I swear to you, I'll drag you off that high horse of yours right into the dirt with me. The disgustingly beautiful children in your future will have a field day with you. May you never rest again.

All that doesn't mean you're wrong, of course, cause you're not. You don't have to tell me. I'm a drunken fool; I'm a forsaken sinner. I'm everything that's wrong with this world, Gale, and that's saying something when you're dropping bombs on Nazis everyday. At least those don't want to kiss their best friend when he looks at them. Or bend him over the next table.

Well, I hope they don't. If they do, then I gotta share my place in hell with them and I'd rather just trade with Prometheus. I need a new liver, anyway, after everything I've put the poor thing through.

You remember the first time we met? Well, of course you do, but I'm gonna tell you anyway. First thing I noticed about you was that biblical fucking glare of yours that makes a poor man feel like he and his momma's blood are getting cursed. I didn't even do anything and you already clocked me as trouble, bloodhound that you are. Honestly, it's your fault that I chained you to my hip. You don't look at a guy like you want to murder him and expect him not to swoon. I just had to crack you, Buck.

Miserable as you are right now, you resemble that stick-up-his-ass prude before he got on a plane a little more than usual, at least when you're awake enough to form half a sentence and throw up all over me. Really, Buck. You're undoing all my hard work. I should've seen it coming. The boys don't like it. I can see it in their shoulders, like they're preparing for the next air raid. You scare them like bombs – that's something. But you and your stoic face, you're not that hard to read. It just takes a bit of time to understand you, that's all. You get angry and sad and excited like the rest of us. You hate talking about yourself but there's moments where you can't help it, like when your girl wrote you a letter and you drop out of the belly of a plane, alive.

You also touch your cheek when you're about to lie. That's why I keep beating you at cards, dumbass.

Most assume you're the moon to my sun. They told me, Buck, it's true. But I disagree – even with me gone, you'd still shine. You'd still be brilliant. That's just how you are, always having to be the best. It's me who's got no anchor inside himself.

Do get better, please. I won't ask again. I miss going to sleep without you coughing like your lung's about to make a guest appearance on the floor. I also want my blanket back. It's positively freezing.

Yours

P.S.: If you snap at me one more time for singing, I cannot be held accountable for my actions. I'm bored, Buck. Leave me the last bit of entertainment we get in this hell. And it is hell, even compared to the missions that should've killed us.

You know what the sky crashing down on us is like. It looks like fireworks if you squint. This is not that – this is frozen mud giving you frostbite from sitting on your ass for too long. Awful, I'd tell you, but you already know.

Buck,

I tell you of war but I don't say what it's really like. Don't laugh at me just yet. It's not that I've forgotten that you saw it all, too. I just don't like

thinking about it, is the truth. Sometimes, I wake up in the middle of the night and I can feel hot blood on my face and I'm not sure if it's mine or not, it's all red in the end. You wear it better than I do. I can't even tell if it bothers you at all, but then I think it's Buck and Buck doesn't let a bit of shrapnel-pierced skin and bones and guts rattle him.

You have this terrible talent of making me feel like we'll last forever. I put an arm around your shoulders and a small eternity unfolds right there. I make you laugh and it expands. Tastes sweet like sugar. I always realize too late that it's a lie – all we got is mud and blood.

Uncle Sam is a dirty fucking liar, that's for sure. I don't want to make my country proud. I don't want to defend freedom. Honestly, I miss home but I don't like it much. You're the only thing that keeps me marching and I gotta tell you, even that resolve is dwindling. A heart can only take so much damage. You stepped on mine enough that it's a banged up thing now, foul and empty. Crush it like rotten fruit and be done with it.

She loved you first and I love you better. I can forgive her for taking you from me but I can't forgive you.

Give me a few days. It'll pass. I'll be okay. I'll stick by your side. Maybe I'll ask you to sock me in the eye and make me feel something new. Maybe I'll prove the Krauts right and just let them shoot me. God, they hate us as much as we hate them. It'd be exhilarating if we weren't stuck here.

You think they're right? You think this is what we are? Vulgar, warmongering children? I'm starting to think it is. For all the good they want you to believe in, I've not seen much of it.

Well, Buck, last time I wrote to you, you were still having a tea party with our dear old friend Death. You're good as new again and you barely thanked me for it. Lousy manners, seriously. The boys are so glad to have you walking once more, you'd think they're teary-eyed sweethearts getting their fellas back. I told you they were worried. In the end, you're the star-spangled bannered dream, baby, and I'm the American bitch they all want to forget.

I need a drink. This place is getting to me. I fucking hate what it's turning me into, I'll tell you that much. You still haven't asked me who I'm writing to.

Yours

Buck,

Fuck you.

Yours

P.S.: You have no idea how I miss flying. The things I'd do to be up in the clouds again, watching for you right behind me. Fuck you and fuck the Nazis for keeping us here like birds in a cage.

Buck,

I'm cold. I don't think this winter will end. The other boys are starting to share bunks for warmth but I don't dare ask you. I don't think I could take it, having you so close.

Now, you don't remember this, but I actually did sleep in your bed before. Guess when. Yeah, you got it, it was while you were sick. That one was an accident, though. Cross my heart. You honestly just took up so much of my time that I didn't get to rest all that much and next thing I know, I'm sitting on your mattress watching you be miserable and my eyes are getting heavy. I woke up to you still knocked out, one of your arms thrown over my lap and your face smashed against my hip. I never brought it up, of course. I think you'd genuinely collapse if I did.

I can already hear you asking, complaining, really – that is, if you won't punch me first – "you put your hands on me like I'm your doll no matter what I say, what's so different now?" And the thing is, it just is.

There's nothing to protect us if I crawl into your bed. No booze and not a hundred other soldiers to laugh it off with. No sense and no God that'll make me hold back.

I didn't ask for this. I never wanted this bottomless want inside me. If I could, I'd cut it out of me right now and burn it, even if it kills me. It's not nice to be left wanting. Starves you in a way hunger will never be able to.

I want to say it's hard work being your friend. But it's not. It's not. It's the

easiest thing I've ever done. Breathing's a reflex. Loving you is too, Buck.

This is the only secret I'll ever keep from you. The rest is yours, but this, I gotta take it to the grave, Buck. You know why. Can't risk it. Can't put you in danger like that. I don't care much about what happens to me, as long as I know you're alive.

I'll carry you through it, kicking and screaming. You won't be heavy cause you're mine. But I'm not gonna compromise on this, Buck. You gotta get out. Promise me. Whatever happens, you'll make it back home. You got a girl waiting for you and a future to get excited about. That's more than a poor sinner like me could want.

This war, I'll let it ruin me. We've made a bit of history, you and I, and it's yours to tell them about it. Then forget about me. Have a long life, get so fucking bored by your job and your wife and your kids you'll almost miss soaring over the clouds, and don't look back. Never look back. You can do that, right? You're good like that. You're still so much more than the friends they took from us.

You get my heart and I get their ghosts to fill my chest with and that's not for the history books but it's all I have to give.

Yours

Buck,

I'm just fine, stop worrying your pretty little head about it. It's getting warmer and I miss playing baseball. I want out. You want to be safe and I want out and it's tearing me apart.

I wish you'd like me enough to risk it. Doesn't matter, though. I'll follow you wherever you go, whether you want me to or not. When you were dancing with Meatball, you were really dancing with me.

Yours

Buck,

If I give you my dog tags, will you finally realize? Me, right over your heart, all hours of the day. I don't care what you think. You're mine, Gale Cleven, till death do us part. I didn't give you my damn name for you to ignore that.

Yours

Buck,

You actually did it – you punched me in the face. I was wondering when you'd hit your limit. I know you're feeling guilty over it and it'd be better if you didn't. I'm not worth all the grief. Besides, I deserved it, didn't I? You don't lash out like that without a good reason. And it felt good. I'm not lying. If I had known you getting violent with me was going to make me feel so alive, I would've asked you years ago to do it.

I made Curt hit me once. It helped. But this is much, much better. You ask why I drink so much and why I'm so reckless and why I can't stay away from you, but Buck, how else am I supposed to make it through without killing myself first. What else do I have to live for?

I'll still pay you back, somehow. One day, when you won't see it coming. Or maybe I'll just let you sit with your guilt while I act like it never happened. Turn the tables, and all that.

A few weeks ago, your face started changing every time you looked at me. Not in the way I'm used to – the small smile reserved only for me. Instead, it's quizzical worry I'm met with, like I'm some homeless stranger you can't decide to throw a cent to. Stop looking at me like that. I haven't changed. I'm just weak and weak men turn ugly.

The mud's all dry now. I thought England was a miserable country but Germany is truly taking the cake. No wonder the people here turned into Nazi-fucks.

Yours

P.S.: Steal another one of my cigarettes and you're dead. You don't even

smoke, asshole.

Buck,

I don't have much time but I wanted to get this down before lights out. The air's changing, I can feel it. Something's happening and if I'm not completely mad, I'd guess the war's coming to an end. I catch myself praying at night that we'll get out of here before the new year, without me having to force you into an escape.

I can be patient. We'll wait it out, exactly like you want it.

You're laughing at my jokes again. I don't think I've felt this relieved since I saw you again when I came here. My body isn't made for your absence. It feels like poison and it'll only get worse once we're back on familiar soil. Then I'll have no other choice but to let you go. Learn to live with a hole in my chest where you belong.

In German, your home, the place you're from and the country you belong in, that's your Heimat. They get homesick just like we do. That's Heimweh, then. Home-sorrow, if you want to get literal. Thing is, Buck, home has lost its meaning to me. It's not America and it's not the house I grew up in. I'm a nomad – I told you, I have nothing to hold on to. I can't even disguise it as flying cause I know I'm just falling.

I want to call you home. That's what you are to me, I won't deny it. But I'm scared to even think it. Everything I carry inside me, you can't know about and you won't understand. I just can't help it. Haven't I written it a hundred times by now? I'm yours, as you are mine.

Break free from this war, Buck, and I promise you, I'll let you move on.

Yours

Buck,

Scratch everything I said. We're marching soon and it's getting close, the

end of it all. Don't ask me to let you go, baby. I can't. I can't. I won't.

I'll take ten more years of war if it means I get more time with you.

Yours

Buck,

War's over. This is the last letter I'll ever write you. After everything, I don't have much to say. We're flying home the next few days and then life starts over. I'm trying not to think too much about that part. Instead, I focus on the parties and the drinking and you laughing more than you ever have before. War's over. We won.

You'll come visit me, right? Don't come visit me. I won't be able to take it. I'll only disappoint you.

Maybe one day, when we're old and gray and you got your grandchildren telling us to eat more greens, I'll show you the letters. Tell you of the madness that gripped me out there in the trenches. Demand my lucky deuce back. Truth is, I forgot about it. I didn't need a good luck charm; I had you. And look how well you worked.

We went to war together and we returned together. Buck-and-Bucky. I was right to bet on us.

You don't know it yet but this is goodbye. Trust me, baby, it's painful. But I can't keep living like this. If you have any mercy left in you, if you know what's good for you, you'll turn your back on me and leave it at that. Please do it for me, Buck.

It has been an honor to serve with you, Major Gale Cleven. Live well. Love far.

Yours

End Notes

much love xx

Edit: i don't even have the words to truly express just how big my heart feels in my chest but I've been sitting with tears in my eyes in front of my laptop and just. I'm so grateful for all the comments yelling at me, every single kudos left, the people always commenting on my tiktoks when i post snippets new, the fics gifted to me and inspired by the letters (HELLO???) and even the edit that was made with this in mind. I never thought the words i write would have such an impact and it may not seem big but it means the world to me and I want you all to know that i see it all and scream about it every time. You're all so lovely. I couldn't have asked for a better community. Thank you, again and again

Works inspired by this one

where all light comes in by Sapphic_terror

i'm back between villages, and everything's still by Sapphic_terror

someone will remember us by Sapphic_terror

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